

Our top ten most read articles in 2013

Since launching in September, USApp has published over 200 articles which have been read thousands of times. Here are our top ten most popular articles by views for 2013. Thanks to everyone for reading, and we look forward to bringing you the best in commentary and research on U.S. politics and policy in 2014!

1. [Ayn Rand rewrote the story of capitalism to show that it is a necessary good](#)

The 2008 financial crisis gave rise to sustained criticism of capitalism as an economic system, with many of its advocates conceding that while an immoral system, it is also a 'necessary evil'. Reflecting on the writings of Ayn Rand, [Yaron Brook](#) and [Don Watkins](#) reject this view, and instead argue that capitalism is a necessary good. They maintain that capitalism is the only social system that takes into account people's rationality, enabling them to survive and prosper through self-interest.



2. [Unlike Detroit, Chicago's diversified industrial base has helped it to successfully switch from a material to a knowledge economy.](#)

In recent decades, some cities with a strong history of manufacturing have been able to make the switch to a strong knowledge economy, and thus have maintained a relative level of economic prosperity in the current economic climate. In the wake of the city of Detroit's filing for bankruptcy, [Saskia Sassen](#) looks at how a city that was once economically very similar – Chicago – has made that successful transition. She argues that the gearing of Chicago's agro-industrial economy, and its associated financial and legal support services, towards international markets have allowed it to succeed in its transition to a knowledge economy. Detroit, on the other hand, has been historically dominated by the automotive industry, and has not been able to redeploy its knowledge and practices in the same way.



3. [The current debate over U.S. intelligence is missing the larger problem, the intelligence community's inability to think big.](#)

Since the end of the cold war, the U.S. intelligence community has been confronted by an increasingly complex and interconnected international system. [Josh Kerbel](#) writes that the intelligence community has largely failed to adapt to this new global system, and is still set on trying to understand complex issues with a narrow focus. He argues that the intelligence community must move away from its closed and insular mindset and learn to 'think big', taking greater advantage of open-source, unclassified information and interdisciplinary perspectives.



4. [The politics of punishment in America are slowly moving away from the mass incarceration policies of the past.](#)

Decades of punitive crime policies, frequently linked with the 'war on drugs', have given the US the highest incarceration rate in the world, with African Americans vastly overrepresented in the prison population. [Tim Newburn](#) argues, however, that there may be some small cause for optimism. In a recent speech, the US Attorney-General, Eric Holder, announced changes to the way offenders would be punished, including a desire to reduce the prison population. In addition to Holder's speech,, the declining use of the death penalty, falling state-level prison populations, and gradual changes to drugs laws, appear to indicate that the politics of punishment in America are beginning to shift.



5. [Improving technology now means that nearly 50 percent of occupations in the US are under threat of computerisation.](#)

While people have been concerned at technology's ability to supplant human workers for hundreds of years, modern advances in computing technology mean that whole occupations may soon be made obsolete. In a study of 700 US occupations, **Carl Frey** and **Michael Osborne** find that nearly 50 percent are threatened by computerisation. They argue that the next generation of big data-driven computers will substitute low-income, low-skill workers in coming decades, and that low-skill workers will need to train in tasks that are less susceptible to computerisation if they are to remain employed.



6. U.S. federal judges are motivated by much more than putting their policy and political preferences into law.

What motivates U.S. federal judges and the types of decisions they make? While for a great deal of time, many judicial commentators have maintained that translating their own political values into law is the prime motivator for federal judges, **Lee Epstein** and **Jack Knight** disagree. Looking at the U.S. courts over the past 60 years, they find evidence that policy-centric accounts can no longer explain judicial behavior. They argue that judges are motivated by aspects of job satisfaction, external satisfaction, leisure, salary, and promotion – not just by ideology.



7. Polarization and political disagreement are an order of magnitude greater now than during previous U.S. government shutdowns.

While the current U.S. government shutdown is not the first by any means, it is by far the most politically polarized, according to **Marina Azzimonti**. Using an index that measures the frequency of newspaper articles that report disagreements about fiscal policy, she finds that levels of political polarization in the current shutdown are four times the average value between 1981 and 2013, and nearly twice what it was during the last shutdowns of 1995 and 1996.



8. The increasing ideological polarization of the Republican and Democratic parties has led to the U.S. government's shutdown.

After lengthy battles over a Continuing Resolution to fund the U.S. government, Congress has failed to reach an agreement, and the government is now in the process of shutting down. **Michele Swers** looks at how and why these budget fights have become a familiar part of Congressional politics in America. She argues that the increasing ideological polarization of the Republican and Democratic parties is a major contributor to their inability to bridge policy divides. This is exacerbated in that most members of Congress represent seats that are very safe for their party, meaning that they are more afraid of losing to an ideologically extreme primary challenger than suffering a defeat in an election.



9. Gender stereotypes mean that voters look for more information on women candidates' competence than they do for men.

Women are still massively underrepresented in public office, with less than a quarter of the House and Senate made up by women. But what role do gender stereotypes play in voters' consideration of female candidates? Using experimental studies, **Tessa Ditonto**, **Allison Hamilton** and **David Redlawsk** tested what information about candidates voters searched for during presidential campaigns. They found that not only do voters, especially Republicans, look for more information about a woman's qualifications and competence for office they also look for more information about their handling of 'compassion issues' – issues that have been traditionally identified with women.



10. The Fed's monetary policies since 2008 have undermined the creation of a growth-producing economic environment.

In June, much to the consternation of financial markets, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, warned that the current program of Quantitative Easing (QE) would likely to come to an end in 2014. But has this



measure been effective in stimulating recovery? Looking at QE's record, [Steven Horwitz](#) argues that by paying a small amount of interest on reserve balances, the Fed has discouraged banks from lending, leading to a de facto bailout program. Now, the Fed faces the very real problem of how to avoid inflation as QE ends and recovery begins.



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